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SUBJECT: REPORT: ARF MULLS VISION STATEMENT, PUSHES DISASTER RELIEF EXERCISE AT SINGAPORE ISG

REF:

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: At the October 8-10 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Inter-sessional Support Group (ISG), ARF members discussed the foundational elements of an ARF Vision Statement to be drafted over the next year. The United States and a few others consistently encouraged ARF members to produce a bold, clear and strategic statement focused on significantly strengthening ARF's mandate with a particular focus on transnational security issues. The Philippines and the United States comprehensively briefed ARF's 27 members on the critical details of a May 4-8, 2009 ARF disaster relief exercise. ISG Participants held a focused and organized discussion of critical security issues facing the ARF region, including the Korean Peninsula, Burma and Pakistan. Delegations also discussed a variety of other institutional initiatives ongoing in ARF. END SUMMARY

DELIBERATIONS OF VISION STATEMENT SUBDUE

¶12. (SBU) Singapore and Thailand chaired a session to discuss the foundational elements of an ARF Vision Statement to be drafted over the next year. A number of delegations focused more at this early stage of discussion on the process of drafting a statement rather than the substance that would form such a statement. Thailand will distribute an initial "list of elements" in November and then an initial draft statement in February 2009. Along with a few other like-minded countries, USDEL consistently stressed the importance that ARF agree to produce a bold, clear and strategic statement focused on significantly strengthening ARF's mandate with a particular focus on transnational security issues.

ARF BRIEFED ON DISASTER RELIEF EXERCISE

¶13. (U) For the first time, ARF's 27 members were comprehensively briefed by the Philippines and the United States on the operational details of the May 4-8, 2009 ARF disaster relief exercise (termed Voluntary Demonstration of Response, or VDR) in Luzon, the Philippines. The Philippines briefed ARF on the scenario, planning assumptions, planning conference dates, invitation process and rules of participation. The United States, as co-chair, and the Philippines approached a number of key ARF members to urge their strong participation in the exercise, and encouraged them to begin identifying appropriate representatives to participate in upcoming VDR planning meetings. These consultations will continue in the coming months as this exercise will occur under an ambitious timeline from October 2008 to May 2009. This multilateral field exercise with ARF members will seek to provide a major deliverable for ARF, highlight major power military cooperation in Southeast Asia, build civil-military assistance capacity for future multinational relief operations and seek to assist local populations in the Philippines. More information on the exercise for posts' use and background will be forthcoming.

¶14. (U) ARF members were also updated on Australia's latest version of

the ARF Strategic Guidance for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Indonesia's briefing on the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) Center. In addition, Indonesia chaired a separate group, titled Shepherds on Disaster Relief, focused on coordinating ARF's growing efforts in regional disaster preparedness.

KOREA, BURMA AND OTHER SECURITY ISSUES DISCUSSED

-- (U) Singapore Deputy Permanent Secretary Peter Ho chaired a focused and organized discussion of critical security issues facing the ARF region. This portion of the discussion was dominated by ARF's non-ASEAN members, with only a few ASEAN countries making limited interventions on these issues. Notes on the interventions of selected delegations are below in para 8.

¶15. (U) KOREAN PENNINSULA: In part due to the absence of the DPRK, most delegations focused on recent, worrisome steps taken by the DPRK in reversing its disablement steps at Yongbyon. All stressed that the peaceful resolution of the DPRK nuclear issue was vital to regional security. They urged that the Six-Party Talks move forward through resumption and completion of the disablement process in cooperation with the IAEA inspection arrangements and early establishment of an effective verification mechanism. This includes fulfillment of all obligations under the agreements reached in the Six-Party Talks. Japan and Australia spoke to their concerns over

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the abductions issue. ROK briefly touched on inter-Korean relations.

¶16. (U) BURMA: Following a lengthy presentation by Burma on its political and humanitarian situation, delegations focused on the need for genuine political dialogue within Burma. Some praised the recent release of Burmese political prisoners while others stressed the importance of legitimately free and fair 2010 elections. Many Western, like-minded countries continued to press Burma for greater cooperation with UN Special Envoy Gambari and the international community. ASEAN was commended for its leadership role in Cyclone Nargis relief while no delegations complained of the lack of access during the early phases of relief efforts.

¶17. (U) IRAN, AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, CLIMATE CHANGE, SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS: With the support of other delegations, the United States expressed serious concern about Iran's continued rejection of repeated P5 plus 1 offers. Some delegations pressed the need for greater reconstruction assistance and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan spoke to the recent, unfortunate terrorist attacks in Islamabad while also defending its efforts in the FATA region and border relationship with Afghanistan. Canada and India both urged more cooperative relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. A few countries spoke to the security implications of climate change. A number of delegations also noted the unique role ARF can play in transnational and non-traditional security issues, including terrorism.

¶18. (U) NOTES ON THE INTERVENTIONS OF SELECTED DELEGATIONS:

AUSTRALIA:

--Remains concerned about DPRK suspension of disablement and IAEA and noted the need for progress on the abductions issue.
--Noted the need for additional releases of political prisoners.
--Appreciated ASEAN's role in facilitating access by the humanitarian community during Nargis.
--Appreciated Pakistan's remarks about the need for greater attention its border region and Afghanistan.
--Pleased by recent terrorist successes in Southeast Asia, but disappointed by the breakdown of peace talks in Philippines.
--Briefed ARF on its proposal for an International Commission on Nonproliferation and Disarmament.

BURMA:

--Noted that each country has "special and unique" conditions that differentiate it from others and the Burma's own political issues are complex and unique.
--Defended the legitimacy of its March 2007 referendum as in line

with Roadmap and cited the 92.48% approval rating from its people for the new constitution.

--Said that all "legitimate persons" will participate in the Roadmap steps.

--Praised the access given by the regime to recent UN visitors.

--Appreciated the assistance from the international community in Nargis relief efforts.

--Concluded by saying that "problems disappear when we talk to each other not about each other."

CANADA:

--Mentioned it had approached ASEAN members on ways forward with Burma.

--Remains concerned 2010 elections will not be free and fair.

--Please that some prisoners were released, but more should be released included Aung San Suu Kyi.

--Remains committed to continue its help to Pakistan with its border region.

--Noted the need for Pakistan to develop a cooperative and constructive relationship with Afghanistan.

--Pressed for DPRK agreement on a verification mechanism.

CHINA:

--Hoped that the international community would continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Burma.

--Said the political conditions in Burma require patience and continued support for the UN and Gambari.

--Said that Sino-Japanese relations remain positive and are "standing at a historical point."

--Noted that, as Chair, the Six Party process has experienced difficulties and urged all parties to show flexibility.

EU:

--Joined the United States in commending ASEAN's role in Nargis relief efforts.

--Burma/Myanmar issue is high on the EU priority list and the EU will maintain its two-track approach of sanctions and positive engagement.

--Said that only genuine dialogue could lead to democratization and Burma should release more political prisoners.

--Welcomed the Group of Friends meeting at the UN.

--Hoped for more support for the EU Special Envoy Fassino and noted he will visit a number of ARF capitals.

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--Said that "the Burmese people must know that the EU is on their side."

--Noted the EU's recent deployment of a police mission to Afghanistan.

--Stressed EU view that widespread agreement exists on the security threats from climate change.

--Noted ongoing, internal EU discussions on a proposal for greater food and development assistance to Asia.

--Expressed concern about the DPRK's removal of seals and surveillance equipment and remains worried about dire humanitarian situation.

--EU noted their readiness to contribute to easing humanitarian problems in North Korea and is ready to consider "stepping up" its engagement and humanitarian assistance with DPRK if positive steps are taken in the Six Party Talks.

INDIA:

--Noted the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating.

--Noted the need for full implementation of the UN CT Convention.

JAPAN:

--Hoped for progress from A/S Hill's trip to Pyongyang.

--Regretted postponement of bilateral 6pt consultations due to DPRK position on abduction issues.

--Said there will be no negative changes in China-Japan relations under Aso.

--Pressed for positive steps by the international community while Myanmar takes its own steps; pleased by recent release of prisoners, but more is needed; noted the need for continued support for Gambari.

--Remains committed to Afghan reconstruction with a \$550m pledge.

--Remains "seriously concerned" about the Iran nuclear issue.

--Hopes to make use of bilateral channel with Iran.

--Briefed ARF on Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) involvement in

support operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

LAOS:

--Welcomed concrete progress on implementation of decisions reached by 6pt.
--Called on "concerned party" to move forward to denuclearize Peninsula and congratulated China on its role in the Six Party process.

MONGOLIA:

--Noted its support for a Northeast Asian multilateral security cooperation forum.

NEW ZEALAND:

--Remains concerned about political developments in Fiji and pointed to the need for int'l pressure and a return to rule of law.
--Noted the PIF communique and roadmap for Fijian democracy and is concerned by the lack of progress toward elections.

PAKISTAN:

--Said it is working on its border issues with Afghanistan and is stabilizing the FATA region through assistance, passport and border controls (biometrics, monitoring, vehicles, etc.) in border area.
--Noted the tragedy from the September 30 terrorist attacks in Islamabad.
--Said that terrorists are trying to target the political leadership to destabilize Pakistan adding that this trend is a reaction to the pressure from Pakistani security services in the border region.
--Noted Pakistan's major sacrifices in border region and the death of 1,200 of its soldiers.
--Said that a comprehensive CT strategy is needed that goes beyond a military strategy.
--Explained that tribal FATA leaders are recognizing the destruction from Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants. "They have decided to go after the terrorists and drive them out...and they have developed ownership of the problem."
--Said greater cooperation is needed between ISAF, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
--Urged that more cooperation is needed from the Afghan side due to its long, porous border.

ROK:

--Noted the need to prevent the DPRK's reversal of disablement steps taken at Yongbyon and hoped A/S Hill's visit to Pyongyang would ensure that verification steps are taken and welcomed Hill's active consultations with other Six Parties.
--Said inter-Korean relations in "deadlock" due to DPRK refusal of dialogue. Added that the ROK is striving to achieve a more balanced and normalized relationship with DPRK.
--Noted that the DPRK has yet to respond to ROK's fifty tons of corn food aid. ROK may consider a World Food Program role for its distribution.
--Said the ROK is pursuing low-carbon growth and other initiatives in response to climate change, including a proposal for an East Asia Climate Change Partnership (US\$200m over 5 years to help developing countries counter the effects of climate change).
--Stressed that the international climate change discussions should

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produce an ambitious climate change regime by 2009.

UNITED STATES:

--Said we remain committed to the Six Party Talks Joint Statement, recent DPRK steps to reverse disablement steps run counter to Six Party expectations, U.S. continues to seek agreement on verification protocol on an "action for action" basis.
--A/S Hill's recent visit to Pyongyang discussed verification measures, is continuing consultations with other Six Party members, and the United States remains committed to the Six Party process.
--Commended ASEAN unity and leadership in Nargis relief and encouraged ASEAN to build upon its successes to address the root causes of Burma's problems.
--Burma's Roadmap is discredited as a constitutional referendum and will not solve Burma's problems.
--Noted that we remain interested in seeing Burma become a prosperous nation with democracy, economy, and rule of law that Burmese people

deserve.

--Said we recognize ASEAN's challenges with Burma and called for persistence.

--Stressed that Iran's repeated rejection of the P5 plus 1's offers remains a serious concern for the region and the international community.

--Congratulated ASEAN on its positive steps to ratify its Charter.

--Noted the particular role for ARF in transnational security efforts.

REMAINING INSTITUTIONAL MATTERS AND INITIATIVES

19. (U) Throughout the ISG, the following issues were also discussed:

--COUNTER TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME (CTTC) WORKPLAN: USDEL updated ARF on the latest draft of the CTTC Workplan meant to organize and manage ARF's efforts in cybersecurity, bioterrorism and illicit drugs. ARF countries have been asked to contribute project ideas to the workplan for implementation in the coming months and years. However, few delegations have yet engaged in the modalities of the workplan and submitting project ideas. Reflecting this dynamic, the United States (as the drafter of the CTTC Workplan) will soon distribute a revised draft.

--DEFENSE OFFICIALS DIALOGUE: ARF defense officials met on October 8. They discussed the transnational threat of terrorism and reiterated the importance of increased cooperation in peacekeeping. ARF Members shared views on current challenges being faced by ARF defense establishments and discussed how they can add further value to the ARF process. The USG was represented by Capt. David Chase of the Joint Staff, Southeast Asia Desk.

--ARF WORKING METHODS: The ASEAN Secretariat's ARF Unit distributed a paper for comment about improving ARF's institutional procedures in a number of areas including decision-making, consolidating ARF's meetings, press relations,

--AUSTRALIA BRIEFING ON NONPROLIFERATION COMMISSION: Australia briefed ARF on its proposal for an International Commission on Nonproliferation and Disarmament.

--VIRTUAL MEETING OF CYBERSECURITY EXPERTS: ROK updated ARF on the latest draft and modalities for its virtual meeting of cybersecurity experts.

--TRACK TWO BRIEFING: The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) and other non-governmental representatives briefed ARF on their latest security cooperation efforts and offer of assistance to ARF for their services.

110. UPCOMING ARF ACTIVITIES:

--12th ARF Heads of Defense Universities Meeting (HDUCIM), Islamabad, 21-23 October 2008 [Pakistan]

--3rd ARF EEPs Meeting, Beijing, 13-15 November 2008 [co-chairs: China, Vietnam]

--ARF Conference on Terrorism and the Internet, Bali, Indonesia, 6-8 November 2008 [co-chairs: Australia, Indonesia]

--Follow-up event to the Chennai Maritime Security Training Programme, India, 17-22 November 2008 [India]

--8th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting (ISM) on Disaster Relief, Banda Aceh, Indonesia, tentatively 5-6 December 2008 [co-chairs: Indonesia, EU]

--ARF Workshop on Anti-Money Laundering, Kuala Lumpur, 2008 [co-chairs: Malaysia, tbc]

--Inaugural ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting (ISM) on Maritime Security, in Surabaya/Medan, Indonesia, 12-13 February 2009 [co-chairs: Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand]

--ARF Seminar on Measures to enhance Maritime Security, TBA, first half of 2009 [co-chairs: EU, Indonesia]

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--1st Inter-Sessional Meeting (ISM) on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, TBA, first half of 2009 [co-chairs: US, China,

Singapore]

--7th ARF ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Vietnam, first half of 2009 [co-chairs: Bangladesh, ROK, Vietnam]

--ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group Meeting on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy (ISG on CBMs and PD), ROK, April 2009 [co-chairs: ROK, Singapore]

--Peacekeeping Course for ARF Member Countries, New Delhi, 18-22 May 2009 [co-chairs: India, tbc]

--ARF Seminar on Laws and Regulations on Disaster Relief Cooperation, Beijing, May 2009 [co-chairs: China, tbc]

--ARF Voluntary Demonstration of Response on Disaster Relief, the Philippines, May 4-8, 2009 with Jan 19-23 and March 9-13 planning events [co-chairs: US, Philippines]

--ARF Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM), Thailand, May 2009 [Thailand]

--16th ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial, Thailand, July 2009 [Thailand]

--ARF Seminar on the Law of the Sea Convention, the Philippines, TBA [co-chairs: Philippines, EU]

--3rd ARF Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting, TBA [co-chairs: Japan, tbc]

--ARF Seminar on International Security Implications of Climate-related events and trends, TBA, first part of 2009 [co-chairs: EU, Cambodia]

--ARF Workshop on Laboratory Bio-Safety and Bio-Security, TBA, first half 2009 [co-chairs: US, tbc]

¶11. (U) POC: The POC for any questions or follow-up is EAP/RSP Kevin Sheives (sheiveskw@state.gov, 202-647-1217). This report and other background information on ARF and U.S. participation in ARF can be found at: <http://eap.state.gov/EAPOffices/RSP/ARF.cfm>

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: For the U.S., the two most important initiatives in the coming year are producing a bold and clear Vision Statement and a successful ARF Disaster Relief Exercise. Many ARF members, especially typically hesitant members, seem unprepared to fully engage on the development of the ARF Vision Statement, a crucial exercise for the future of ARF in today's rapidly evolving regional architecture. ARF members were largely interested in the ARF Disaster Relief Exercise and were pleased to receive exercise details. Targeted engagement with key ARF members over the coming months on both of these initiatives will remain critical for both U.S. efforts in ARF and the future of ARF itself.

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